Lovely Strange Dark
SHIRUBE NO MICHI
BY KONNO KITA
STORY 4
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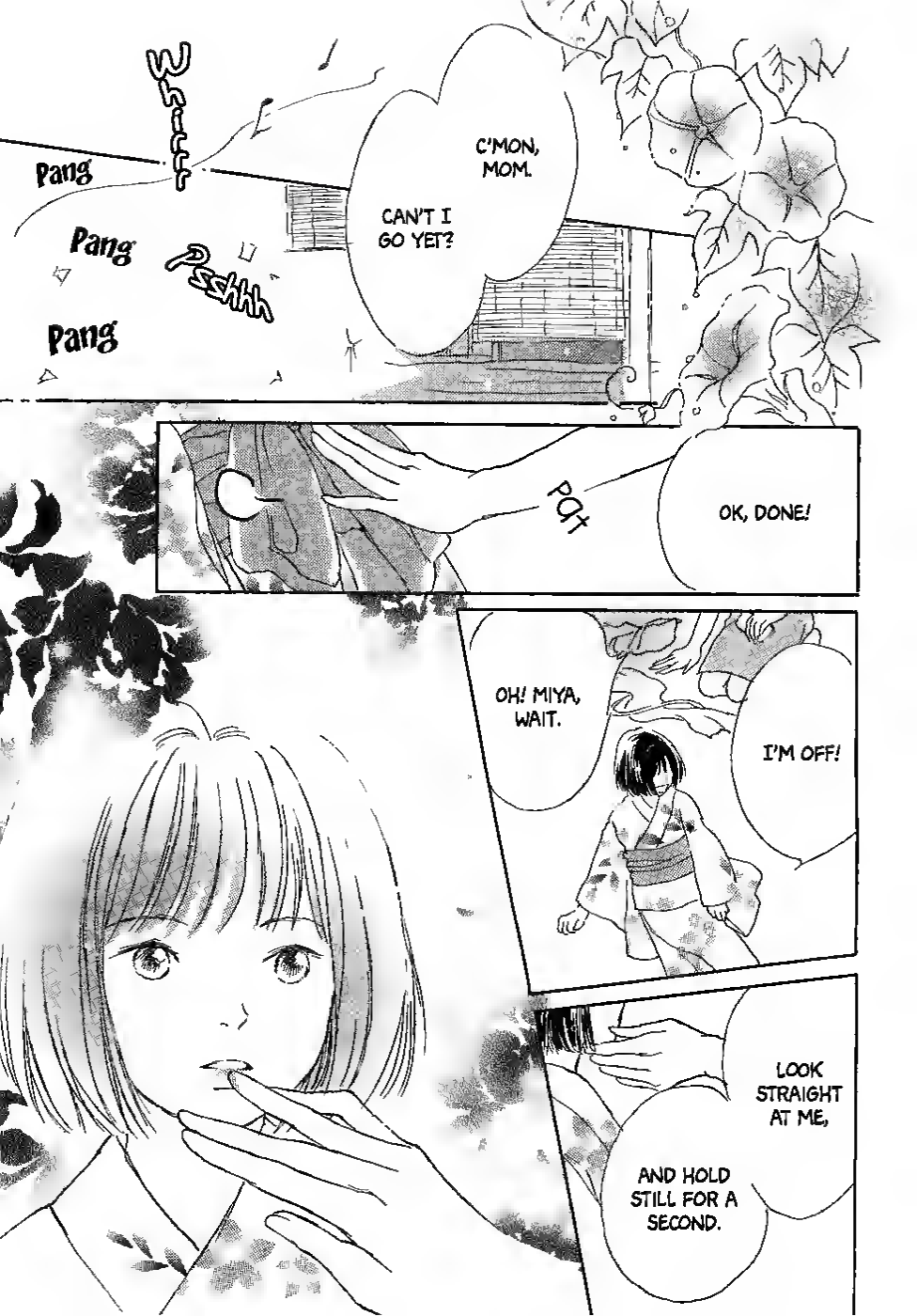
lovelystrangedark.wordpress.com


Pang
Pang
Pang
C'MON, MOM.
CAN'T I GO YET?
Pat
OK, DONE!
OH! MIYA, WAIT.
I'M OFF!
LOOK STRAIGHT AT ME,
AND HOLD STILL FOR A SECOND.

YEAH, A LITTLE LIPSTICK
REALLY MAKES A GIRL SHINE.
IT DOESN'T LOOK WEIRD?
NOT WEIRD AT ALL. IT'S SUPER CUTE.
BE CAREFUL!
AND DON'T STRAY TOO FAR.
OK!

Foxfire

I'M OFF!
RATTLE

YOUR MOTHER DID ME A FAVOR THE OTHER DAY.
Bow
SO YOU LEFT THESE?
Smile
Nod
OH!

YOU'VE GOT BLOOD ON YOUR ARM.
MISTER,
—SO I DO.
I MUST HAVE SCRAPED MYSELF ON A SHRUB ON MY WAY HERE.
HUMAN SKIN CAN BE SO FRAGILE.
UM...
Human skin?
TAKE THIS.

SAY HI TO YOUR MOM FOR ME.
...THANK YOU.
MIYA?
WHAT'S WRONG? WAS SOMEONE HERE?
MOM.

SOME TALL GUY JUST STOPPED BY.
HE LEFT US THESE.
SOME GUY?
YEAH, HE WAS THIN AND PALE AND HAD SLANTED EYES.
Like this.
THIN AND PALE... OH!
MAYBE IT WAS THE YOUNG MAN I SAVED FROM THE RAIN?
HE SAID TO SAY HI TO YOU.
SPLOOSH
Want to share?
It's August
...PERSIM-MONS, HMM.
YEAH, THEY'RE PERSIM-MONS.
YOUR DAD LOVES THEM.
Let's take them.
YOU LIKE THEM TOO, MOM.

MIYAAAA!
Occa-
sionally,
You look so cute, Mayu! ♡
You do too!
odd little gifts
appear on our doorstep just like that.
Whirr
Pang
Pang
Pang

MAYU.
PANG
Things like freshly-plucked flowers, or fruits and vegetables that look straight from the garden.
MAYU?
PANG
PANG
PANG
We even get out of season things, and they're always ripe.
OH, IT'S YOU, MIYA?
PANG
PANG
PANG
HMM?
Smirk
Far some unknown reason,
my young imagination had come to the conclusion that the people who leave them aren't human
D'YOU GET ABANDONED AGAIN?

Raahh!!
MIYAAA'S ADOPTED!
GOT LEFT BEHIND
RIGHT HERE AT EITOKU TEMPLE!
AHAHAHA
MIYA THE THROW-AWAY GIRLLL!
Raahh!!
NOT TRUE!
I AM NOT!
I'VE GOT A MOM AND DAD!
SNAP
AH!
FLARE

Slide
WHAT THE HECK!?
AH-
AH-
But it's not hot.
Fire?
COME.
COME,
THIS WAY.
Turn
UM...

WHO ARE YOU GUYS?
YOUR LANTERN
WENT OUT.
THERE'S NO LIGHT.
YOU SHOULD LIGHT IT.
BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY MATCHES.

SHE SAID MATCHES.
DID YOU HEAR?
HEHE
HEHE
MATCHES.
HEHE
HEHE
LOOK.
FLARE
WHY WOULD YOU NEED THEM?
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO
IS HOLD YOUR HAND OVER IT.
I CAN'T DO THAT!
YES, YOU CAN.
YOU CAN.
YOU CAN.
YOU CAN.

FLARE
SEE, YOU DID IT.
WE KNEW IT.
WE KNEW YOU COULD.
YOU'RE ONE OF US.
NOW, LET'S GO.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

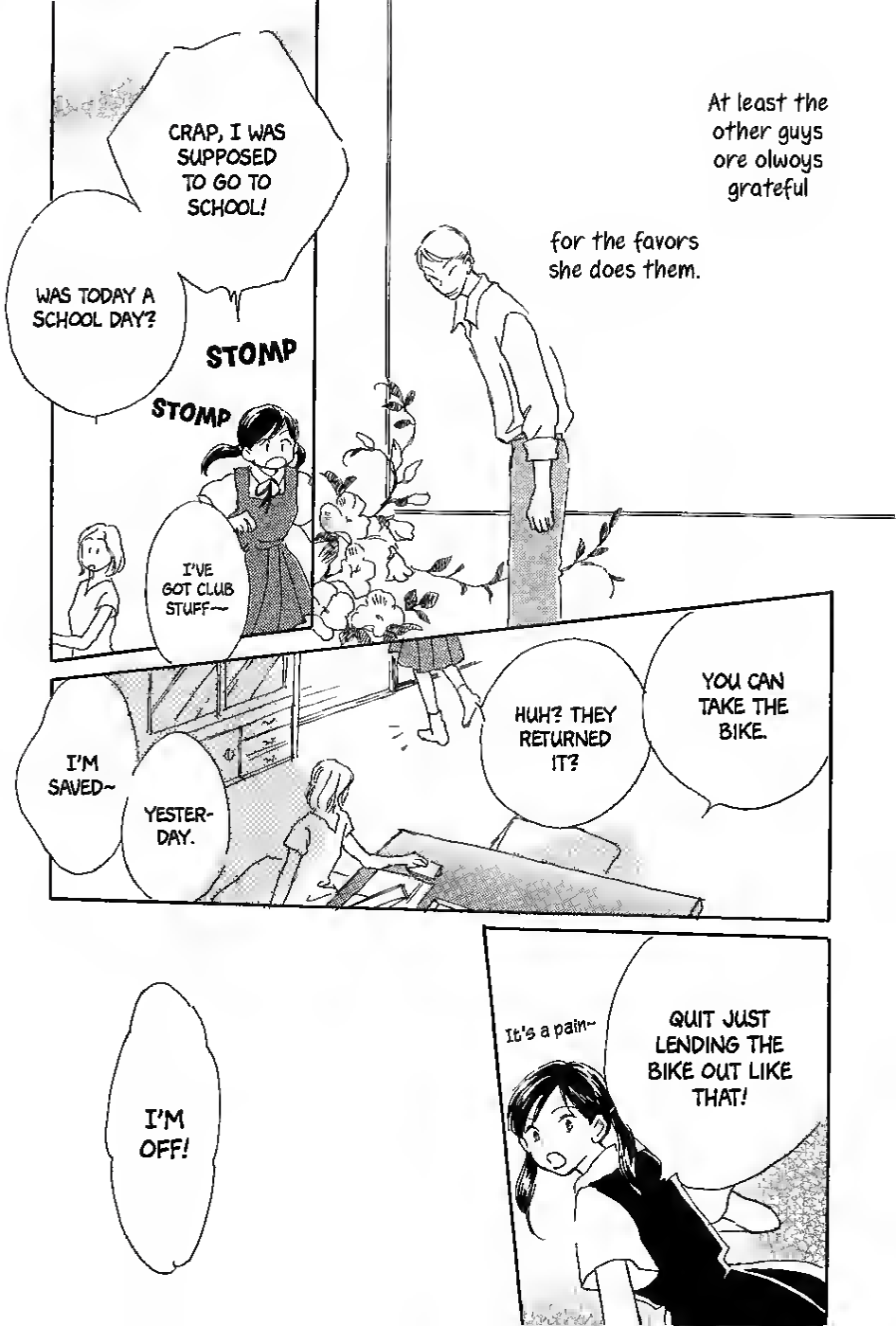
I'M
GOING HOME...!

I ran off in shock, filled with terror.
The stares of those children in fox masks
stabbed into my back.
It was as if that dark gateway would suck me in
if I looked back even once—

MOM!
THERE ARE FLOWERS BY THE DOOR!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
OH! THEY'RE WINTERSWEET FLOWERS. THEY SMELL LOVELY.
Wintersweet
They do smell great♡
THEY BLOOM IN THE WINTER.
YEAH.
MOM, YOU MUST'VE DONE SOMETHING AGAIN.
YOU SAY THAT LIKE IT'S A BAD THING.
Talked to
or helped out someone weird

It turns aut
Fetch me a vase, Miya.
SOMEONE WENT TO THE TROUBLE OF LEAVING THESE FOR US, SO I'LL USE THEM TO DECORATE THE MEMORIAL INSIDE.
Tap
fey creatures on a regular basis.
that my mam happens across
Morning, big brother.
It's already noon
THEY REALLY DO SMELL GOOD.
Click
Click
Click

HOW MANY YEARS NOW HAVE YOU BEEN PRESIDENT?
THEY SHOULD ROTATE WORK EVERY YEAR.
MORE WORK FOR THE LADIES' ASSOCIATION?
YES.
Ladies Hard at Work
HO HO HO
YOU'RE TOO MUCH OF A PUSHOVER!
Click
Click
EVERYONE'S JUST SO BUSY.
PLUS, I DON'T HAVE A DAY JOB.
I Won't be able to count.
PLEASE DON'T TALK TO ME RIGHT NOW.
I CAN ALWAYS RELY ON MY LADIES.


At least the other guys are always grateful
for the favors she does them.
CRAP, I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO TO SCHOOL!
WAS TODAY A SCHOOL DAY?
STOMP
STOMP
I'VE GOT CLUB STUFF~
I'M SAVED~
YESTER-DAY.
HUH? THEY RETURNED IT?
YOU CAN TAKE THE BIKE.
It's a pain~
QUIT JUST LENDING THE BIKE OUT LIKE THAT!
I'M OFF!

EE EE EE K!!
FWOOSH
IS SHE GOING FASTER THAN THE CAR?
SHE'S REALLY FAST!
VRM
SCREEE
...MOM!
HAA--
HAA-
HAAA--
WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU LEND THE BIKE TO?
It goes so fast My eyes can't keep up.

...MOM?
OH HI, MIYA. THAT WAS FAST.
I FEEL A LITTLE SLUGGISH.
WHAT'S WRONG?
YOU FEEL WARM. MAYBE YOU CAUGHT A COLD?
I'LL HEAD TO THE PHARMACY.
BE RIGHT BACK!
NO GOOD, WE'RE OUT OF MEDICINE ...
THAT'S OK, I'LL JUST SLEEP IT OFF.
NO WAY!
You have to take summer colds seriously.

FORGIVE ME FOR JUST DROPPING BY.
OH!
UM, SHE'S IN BED WITH A COLD RIGHT NOW.
Bow
YOUR MOTHER—
I KNOW.
I'M HERE TO WISH HER WELL.
SHE DID MY SON A FAVOR SOME TIME AGO.

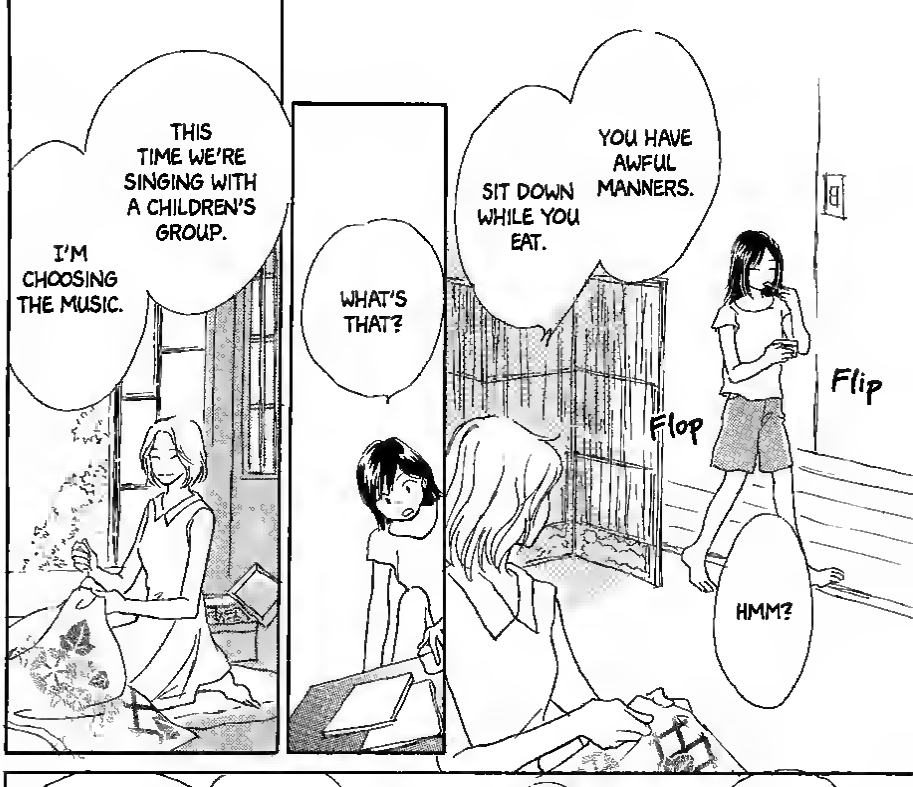
HUH?
OH, OK. THANKS...
THIS IS FOR YOUR MOTHER.
—She already knows?
What is it?
IT'S NOT HEAVY.
PUFF
Bdmp
AND YET, IT SEEMS THAT THE BLOOD OF MEN LIES THICKER IN YOU.
PART US, PART THEM.
YOU ARE A LOSTLING.
LOST-LING?

YOU-
YOU KNOW MY PARENTS?
WOULD HAVE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ENTRUST YOU TO HUMANS.
THUS YOUR PARENTS
I-I'M 14. Ma'am.
HOW OLD ARE YOU?
NO, ONLY THEIR CLAN.
BUT THE SPARK OF HUMANITY IN YOU WILL EVENTUALLY FADE AWAY.
IT MAY TAKE A HUNDRED YEARS,

MY SON TOOK A GREAT LIKING TO YOU.
HE ASKED ME TO VISIT AND SEE WHAT KIND OF LADY YOU'D BECOME.
AND SO I CAME.
HOWEVER,
I WILL ASK MY SON TO PAUSE IN HIS PURSUIT OF YOU, FOR NOW.

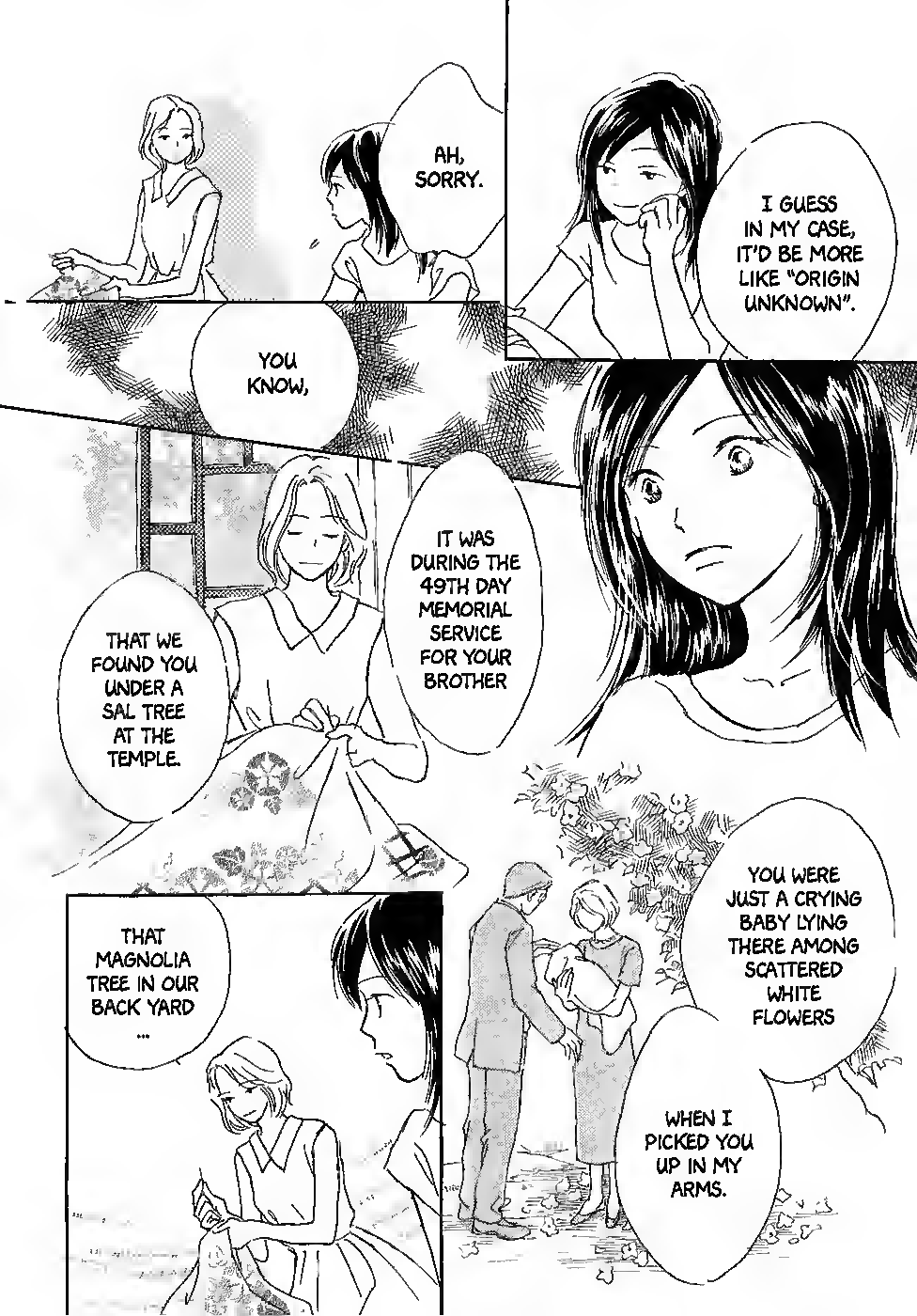
BE WELL.
Slide
swish

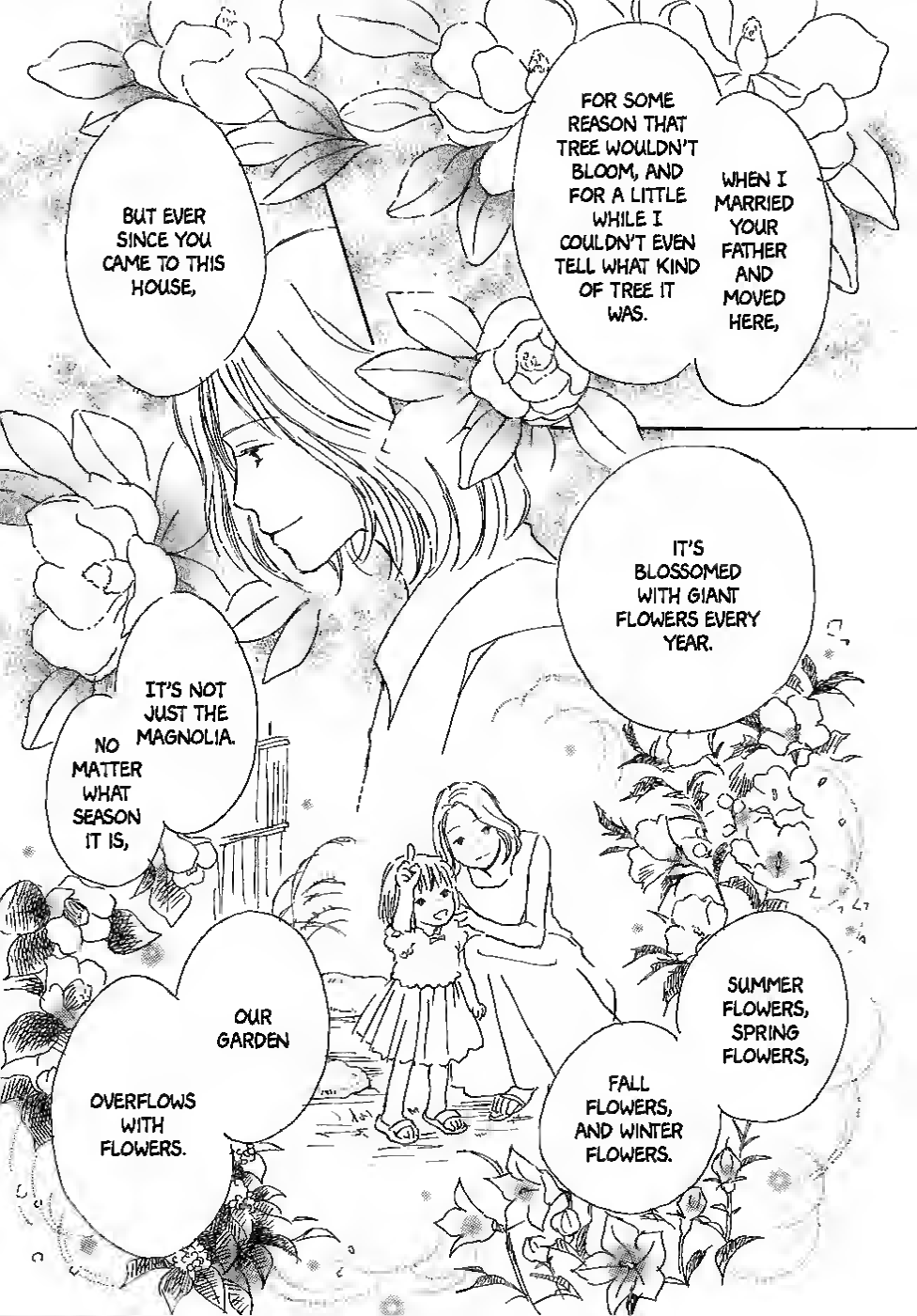
I JUST SUDDENLY FEEL BETTER.
MOM?
OH MY.
LOOKS LIKE MY FEVER WENT DOWN, TOO.
...SHE REALLY WAS HERE TO WISH YOU WELL.
Is that a wrapping cloth?
What a nice pattern.

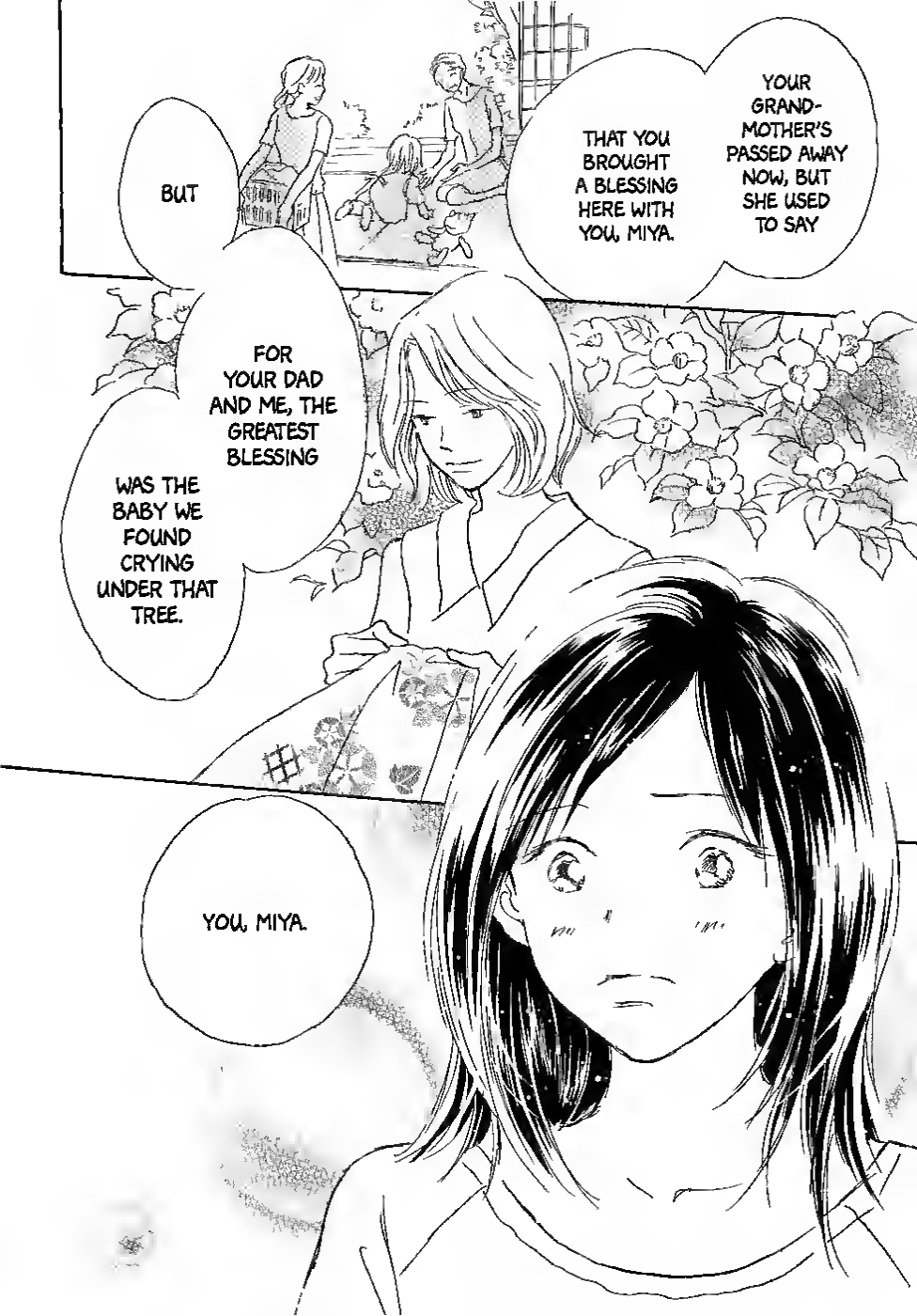

THIS TIME WE'RE SINGING WITH A CHILDREN'S GROUP.
I'M CHOOSING THE MUSIC.
WHAT'S THAT?
YOU HAVE AWFUL MANNERS.
SIT DOWN WHILE YOU EAT.
Flop
Flip
HMM?

HUH? THE COMPOSER IS UNKNOWN... OH, THIS ONE TOO.
OH, I KNOW THIS ONE.
Flip
"SONGS FROM THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE".
BUT THE LYRICISTS AND COMPOSERS ARE UNKNOWN... THAT'S SURPRISING.
THESE SONGS ARE FAMOUS ENOUGH TO BE PRINTED IN A TEXT BOOK,

THAT'S BECAUSE A LOT OF THEM WERE MADE BY COMMITTEE.
SOME OF THE SONGS HAD THEIR COMPOSERS IDENTIFIED LATER ON, THOUGH.
NO WAY~ THAT SOUNDS SO ROMANTIC.
THOSE REALLY OLD POETRY COLLECTIONS WERE THE SAME, THE MANYOUSHUU AND KOKINSHUU...
IT'S AMAZING
THAT THE BEAUTY OF THE WORDS AND MELODIES HAVE SURVIVED ALL THIS TIME
WITH THEIR CREATORS UNKNOWN.
MIYA, YOU'RE SO SENTIMENTAL.


AH, SORRY.
I GUESS IN MY CASE, IT'D BE MORE LIKE "ORIGIN UNKNOWN".
YOU KNOW,
IT WAS DURING THE 49TH DAY MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR YOUR BROTHER
THAT WE FOUND YOU UNDER A SAL TREE AT THE TEMPLE.
YOU WERE JUST A CRYING BABY LYING THERE AMONG SCATTERED WHITE FLOWERS
WHEN I PICKED YOU UP IN MY ARMS.
THAT MAGNOLIA TREE IN OUR BACK YARD ...

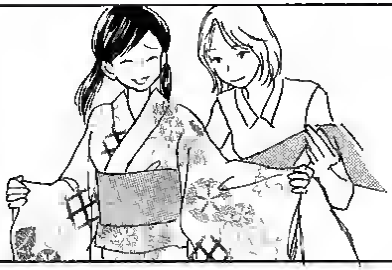

WHEN I MARRIED YOUR FATHER AND MOVED HERE,
FOR SOME REASON THAT TREE WOULDN'T BLOOM, AND FOR A LITTLE WHILE I COULDN'T EVEN TELL WHAT KIND OF TREE IT WAS.
BUT EVER SINCE YOU CAME TO THIS HOUSE,
IT'S BLOSSOMED WITH GIANT FLOWERS EVERY YEAR.
IT'S NOT JUST THE MAGNOLIA.
NO MATTER WHAT SEASON IT IS,
SUMMER FLOWERS, SPRING FLOWERS,
FALL FLOWERS, AND WINTER FLOWERS.
OUR GARDEN
OVERFLOWS WITH FLOWERS.


YOUR GRAND-MOTHER'S PASSED AWAY NOW, BUT SHE USED TO SAY
THAT YOU BROUGHT A BLESSING HERE WITH YOU, MIYA.
BUT
FOR YOUR DAD AND ME, THE GREATEST BLESSING
WAS THE BABY WE FOUND CRYING UNDER THAT TREE.
YOU, MIYA.

COME TRY IT ON.
HUH? THAT'S FOR ME?
SNIP
OK, IT'S DONE.
With this pattern?
WHAT, DID YOU THINK IT WAS FOR YOUR DAD?
in the darkness of that shrine,
I won't waver.
Even if I once again come across foxfire

Like the little gifts

left ononymously by our door,



I'll olso be oble to give bock to the people I love.

I hope thot one doy

That is my greatest wish of all.

❖end❖